

Against the Grain

Volume 20 | Issue 1

Article 19

February 2008

From the Reference Desk

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Recommended Citation

Gilson, Thomas (2008) "From the Reference Desk," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 1, Article 19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2701>

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From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

In his preface to **Oxford University Press'** new reference work *African American National Biography* (2008, 978-0195160192, \$795), Editor **Henry Louis Gates** observes a truth that reference librarians will recognize and applaud. In his discussion of the early struggle of African American Studies to become an established discipline, **Gates** notes that scholars "had to find a way to map the field with reference works, sophisticated reference works such as biographical dictionaries, encyclopedias of history and culture ... in short all of the foundational reference works that, taken together, bring a field of study into the realm of scholarship." Due in no small part to the work of **Dr. Gates** and his colleagues, this corpus of foundational works is available and the new eight-volume *African American National Biography* is the latest significant addition to it.

Originally this project was intended as a compliment to **Oxford's American National Biography** (1999, 0-19-520635-5, \$2,500) but when **Dr. Gates** realized the number of African Americans whose contributions made them worthy of inclusion, it became obvious that a separate and new work was in order. The resulting set includes biographical sketches of some 4,100 noteworthy African Americans. However, unlike the aforementioned *American National Biography*, people still living are included. Biographies of people still making vital contributions and representing a diversity of fields include **B.B. King, Dave Winfield, Chris Rock, Densel Washington, J.C. Watts, Cornel West, Condoleezza Rice, and Clarence Thomas**. And of course, they join names like **Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Louis Armstrong, Jesse Owens, Bessie Smith, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Thurgood Marshall, Althea Gibson, and James Baldwin**.

The entries are alphabetical arranged throughout the eight volumes and there are a number of very useful indexes including one by subject and realm of renown, an index

by birthplace, and a list of African American Prizewinners, medalists, members of **Congress** and judges. The individual entries are comprehensive and thorough with an emphasis on significant contributions, as well as biographical facts. And while these entries are an obvious value of the set, using the index by subject and realm of renown coupled with individual biographies also enables researchers to trace the history of the African American experience via the lives of these prominent people.

The only negative is the length of the bibliographies for each entry. Many are three to four citations in length and one is left wishing there were more sources listed. Fortunately, plans call for this reference to be updated as part of **Oxford's** online *African American Study Center*. As things stand some 2,000 new biographies will be added initially. Hopefully, this will also allow for updating and enhancing the bibliographies. (Those interested in more information on this elaborate online reference resource should point their browsers to <http://www.oup.com/online/africanamerican/>)

The *African American National Biography* is another major reference work that will add luster to **Oxford University Press'** reputation for serious scholarship. Given the set's obvious quality, the inclusiveness of its coverage and the importance of *African American Biography* as a reflection of American history, libraries of all types would be wise to consider it.

With recent headlines focused on the subprime mortgage crisis and past concerns about the criminality related to the **ENRON** and **WorldCom** scandals, the relationship of business ethics to broader society is a topic of growing significance. However, it is also a subject that is complex and multidimensional. The *Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society* (2008, 978-1412916523, \$795), edited by **Prof. Robert W. Kolb**, is a five-volume set that vividly attests to this fact. It contains more than 900 entries covering topics that draw from a diversity of related fields to "embrace commerce in all its ethical and social dimensions."

There are articles representing a number of broad categories including political theory, applied ethics, rights, corporate power, organization, and governance, problematic practices and events, employee issues, gender, age, ethnicity, diversity, and sexual orientation, customers and consumers, justice, environmental theory, and regulation and legislation. Specific issues as divergent as informed consent, executive compensation, intellec-

tual property, accounting ethics, economies of scale, affirmative action, Bhopal, price fixing, age discrimination, Ponzi schemes, insider trading, leveraged buyouts, lemon laws, and fiduciary duty are all discussed within these five volumes.

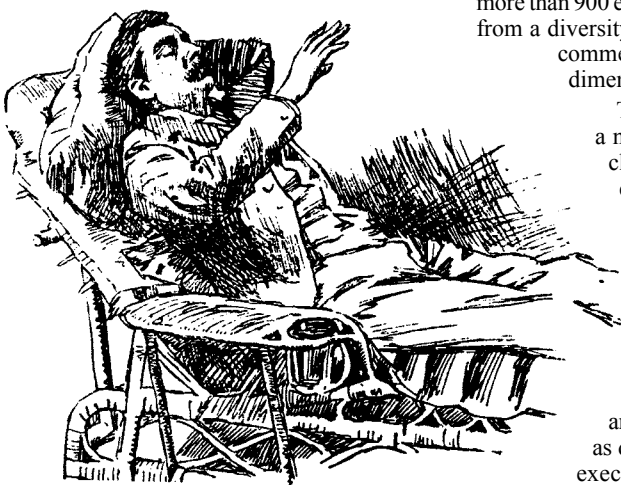
The inter-relatedness of the entries is reinforced by numerous "See also" references, as well as a Reader's Guide that groups all the entries in the *Encyclopedia* under larger business themes. A strong general index is also provided that further helps to link topics together, as well as point to content in specific volumes and on specific pages.

Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society is another multivolume set in **Sage's** growing catalog of interdisciplinary reference works. Like many important reference works, it is more that a collection of articles. Through the efforts of its editors and contributors, the *Encyclopedia* provides a valuable service to scholarship by lending definition to an emerging discipline of related elements. Academic libraries supporting business programs and larger public libraries that have patrons concerned with the relationship between business ethics and societal issues will benefit by adding this title to their collections.

Women in the American Civil War (2008, 978-1851096008, \$195) published by **ABC-CLIO** is a two-volume set that fills a gap in the reference literature. While coverage of women and their part in American history has grown over the years, the role of women in the **Civil War** has not received the appropriate attention. Editor **Lisa Tendrich Frank** remedies this oversight by offering an in-depth treatment of the complex nature of women and their contributions during this seminal struggle. The articles in this set show that, far from being the "self sacrificing feminine patriots" that the popular accounts of the day portrayed, many women stepped outside traditional roles.

The first volume is introduced by 14 contextual essays that "provide an overview of how various groups of women experienced the era and how women in general shared similar experiences." They also point to the complex and diverse nature of this experience by dealing with topics ranging from Abolition and Northern Reformers to Female spies, and from African American Women to the Confederate Homefront. There are also similar essays that cover Southern Women, the Union Homefront, Religion, Politics, Wartime Employment, Northern Women, Nurses, Wartime Literature and Female Combatants. In addition, there are numerous "see also" references from these essays to specific related articles contained in the main part of the set. As you would expect, each of these essays has a useful bibliography.

continued on page 55



From the Reference Desk
from page 54

As alluded to above the main part of this set consists of more than 300 articles that cover the lives of numerous individual women, domestic concerns like courtship, marriage, and family life, women's perspective on military practices like conscription and enlistment, discussions of topics like girlhood and adolescence, as well as the actual involvement of women in specific battles. There is also discussion of issues that reflect the darker side of women's experience like prostitution, rape, and the impacts of guerilla war, as well as disease, bread riots, and both Confederate and Union widows.

The articles are relevant, readable and full of essential facts. Value added features include a chronology, a collection of 24 primary sources, a collected bibliography, a helpful general index and black and white photos that enhance the visual attractiveness of the set.

Women in the American Civil War provides thorough coverage of an era of American Women's history that is deserving of serious scholarly attention. Editor **Lisa Tendrich Frank** and her contributors have skillfully produced an accessible and easy to use reference work that should find a welcome home in both academic and larger public libraries. 🌿

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Parlez-vous Français

by **Thomas Leonhardt** (St. Edward's University) <thomasl@stedwards.edu>

The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary, Fourth Edition, Edited by **Marie-Hélène Corréard** and **Valerie Grundy**, published by **Oxford University Press** (2007, ISBN-13 : 978-0-19-861422-7, \$55.00).

Companies flogging products often know no shame so my early warning antennae are on high alert when I read what could be misleading claims. The blurb that came with this new dictionary reads, in part, "This invaluable reference features:

- thousands of new words spanning everything from technology and medicine to colloquial slang
- headwords in color and changes to layout to further improve accessibility
- increased coverage of acronyms and EU terminology
- more material for students on their year abroad or anyone living in the French speaking world such as sample utility bills, bank statements, and leases
- new and updated cultural notes to help students grasp the essence of the language
- a numbers page at the start of the dictionary covers the increasing frequency of numeric abbreviations, such as '0800 number' and '24/7'

This time, the hype is justified because, as touted, it is up-to-date and it "gets right to the heart of both languages."

I really like this dictionary. If I were French (*zut alors, ne serait-ce que pour un instant*), I would be able to learn that a "goodfella" is a *gangster* and that a "goody two shoes" is a *modele de vertu* and that its meaning is ironic.

As an American whose French is rusty and never was that good, I

re-learn to count in French and also learn when to use *en*, how to express approximate numbers, familiarize myself with phrases using numbers, and how to express calculations and decimals. All of these things are contained in one, easy-to-read box.

There are similar boxes dealing with colours, the clock, nationalities, and age, as in "*Quel age avez-vous?* Months of the year, time units, surface area measurements, speed, currency & money, sizes, military ranks & titles, shops, trades, & professions, and games & sports are other quick reference areas that supplement phrase books and give usage tips besides.

Usage and contemporary vocabulary are major strengths of this dictionary. One can find usage guides for words such as *have*, *go*, *should*, *since*, and *do* for the French speaker and, for example, *ce*, *quelqu'un*, *qui que*, *quel*, *quelque*, *and*, *encore* for the English speaker.

There is a ninety-four page section titled "*Communication mode d'emploi/Guide to Effective Communication*" that covers Internet, SMS, telephone, business & general correspondence, living in France, and seeking employment with English and French language pages facing one another.

I will not dispose of my ragged **Cassel's** yet, however, because I suspect that it is better for literary needs and besides, you can never have too many language dictionaries but some are better than others and if I had to choose one, it would be **The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary**. Any library supporting French language studies needs to provide this reference work to its public. 🌿

